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USDA APHIS | Animal Welfare Act



United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service



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Animal Welfare Act

Related Links

Retail Pet Store Regulation

Importation of Dogs Regulation

Animal Welfare Act Inspections

Animal Welfare Act Enforcement

Animal Welfare *Federal Register* Notices

2010s

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EXHIBIT

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USDA Animal Care, a unit within the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, administers the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). This federal law establishes requirements concerning the transportation, sale, and handling of certain animals and includes restrictions on the importation of live dogs for purposes of resale, prohibitions on animal fighting ventures, and provisions intended to prevent the theft of personal pets. Regulations established under the AWA set standards for the humane care and treatment for certain animals that are exhibited to the public, sold for use as pets, used in research, or transported commercially. Facilities using regulated animals for regulated purposes must provide their animals with adequate housing, sanitation, nutrition, water and veterinary care, and they must protect their animals from extreme weather and temperatures. The regulations also establish specific requirements that must be met prior to the importation of dogs for resale purposes.

Highly-trained USDA inspectors located throughout the United States conduct routine, unannounced inspections of all facilities licensed or registered under the AWA to assess these facilities compliance with AWA. Inspectors are classified as veterinary medical officers (VMOs) or Animal Care inspectors (ACIs). All VMOs have graduated from a veterinary medical college, and many have been private-practice veterinarians prior to joining USDA Animal Care. ACIs have education in the biological sciences and/or extensive experience in the care and handling of animals. USDA Animal Care also employs veterinarians who specialize in the care of particular animal species as well as those with a specific area of animal expertise such as research or transportation.

Inspectors use the AWA standards and regulations as the baseline by which they assess a facility's level of care provided to animals. If a facility is meeting the federal standards, USDA knows the animals there are receiving humane care and treatment. Conversely, when inspectors identify items that are not in compliance with the federal standards, USDA Animal Care holds those facilities responsible for properly addressing and correcting those items within a set timeframe. If the noncompliance is not corrected, or if it is of a serious enough nature, USDA has the option to pursue appropriate regulatory compliance and enforcement actions.

The AWA, which became law in 1966, does not cover every type of animal used in every type of activity. The following animals are not covered: farm animals used for food or fiber (fur, hide, etc.); coldblooded species (amphibians and reptiles); horses not used for research purposes; fish; invertebrates (crustaceans, insects, etc.); or birds, rats of the genus *Rattus*, and mice of the genus *Mus* that are bred for use in research. Birds (other than those bred for research) are covered under the AWA but the regulatory standards have not yet been established.

Additional Information

- Animal Welfare Act and Regulations [Blue Book]
- Animal Welfare Inspection Guide
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests
 - How to Make a FOIA Request
- File an Animal Welfare Complaint
- News
- APHIS Publications Ordering System
- Regulated Businesses (Licensing and Registration)
- Importing Dogs into the United States